



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Acadia National Park

P.O. Box 177

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IN REPLY REFER TO:

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## **Finding of No Significant Impact Blackwoods Campground Rehabilitation & Policy Changes**

### **Introduction**

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to rehabilitate Blackwoods Campground in Acadia National Park (ANP), Mount Desert, Maine, and change several management policies in the campground.

The purposes of the proposed activities include:

1. preserving the campground's rustic character, historic structures, cultural landscape, and natural resources;
2. improving visitor experiences;
3. meeting the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act; and,
4. improving park operations.

The rehabilitation work would include rehabilitating roads, the ranger station, comfort stations, and signs; repairing drainage and utilities; providing universal accessibility; and revegetating many campsites and disturbed areas. Policy changes would affect generator use, collecting firewood, and would set a limit on the width of recreational vehicles allowed.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was released for a 30-day public comment period on August 8, 2003, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NPS Director's Order 12 (DO-12). The EA (attached) described the goals and objectives of the rehabilitation project, analyzed the effects of three alternative actions, and solicited public comments. An impact analysis was performed on natural and cultural resources; namely soils, wetlands, natural communities (vegetation), wildlife, air quality, soundscape, cultural landscapes, and historic structures. Three topics relating to human use were analyzed; these included visitor and staff safety, visitor use and experience, and socioeconomics.

This document briefly summarizes the EA in terms of the appropriate regulatory context consistent with NEPA and DO-12 and provides the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

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### **Alternatives Considered**

The three alternatives proposed and analyzed in the EA included:

- Alternative A – No Action.
- Alternative B – Rehabilitate all campground facilities, maintaining current services and rustic atmosphere (NPS preferred alternative).
- Alternative C – Rehabilitate all and modernize selected campground facilities to provide additional visitor amenities.

#### **Alternative A**

This alternative would retain Blackwoods Campground in its current condition and would not proceed with any rehabilitation or policy changes. Although it would not meet the basic project purposes, this “No Action” alternative was analyzed (as required by NEPA) to provide a baseline upon which to compare the effects of the proposed rehabilitation alternatives. No new employee housing or volunteer campground host facilities would be provided. Some facilities could be rehabilitated if and when funds were to become available, but any rehabilitation would be done over a long period of time. Park staff would continue to educate visitors about nuisance wildlife and enforce regulations related to food storage, but other steps to manage nuisance animals such as installing food disposal stations or repairing structures to exclude animals would not be implemented. Recreational vehicles (RVs) would continue to be limited to a length of 35 feet, but there would be no width limit. Collecting dead and down wood would continue to be allowed in the campground. Generators could be used from 7 am until 10 p.m. Five group campsites would remain interspersed with individual sites.

#### **Alternative B**

This NPS Preferred Alternative “Full Rehabilitation” would rehabilitate structures, replace campsite furnishings, improve individual campsites, re-vegetate denuded areas, provide universal access to restrooms and selected campsites, realign the RV wastewater dump station, add employee housing, repair and upgrade utilities, upgrade electric transmission lines, improve drainage, replace signs as needed, remove several poorly-placed campsites, and repair roadways. A small apartment building would be built for employee housing, and several campsites would be equipped with electric hook-ups for use by campground employees serving as campground hosts. The number of group campsites would be reduced from five to four, and they would be relocated closer to the ranger station and separated slightly from adjacent campsites.

ANP’s campground mission statement directs the NPS to provide for a rustic and quiet experience in the campground while protecting cultural and natural resources. Revised campground policies would further restrict the hours of generator use and limit the width of RVs to 12-feet, while retaining a length limit of 35-feet. Collecting firewood would be prohibited in the campground, but allowed within 100 feet of roadways within the park.

Rehabilitation would be scheduled to allow one loop of the campground to remain open from mid-May until early October each year until the project was completed. Rehabilitation would be expected to last for two to three years. It would probably be necessary to close the campground to winter camping for one winter.

#### **Alternative C**

Alternative C includes most of the elements of the preferred alternative, but would also include some modernization elements and differences in management practices. In addition to the rehabilitation work proposed in Alternative B, this alternative would include replacing (rather than rehabilitating) the ranger station, widening roadways, excavating a swale through the central wetland system in Loop A, prohibiting firewood collecting, prohibiting generator use, installing insulation and heat in one comfort station in each loop for winter camping, providing electric hookups at some campsites for campers with special needs, and limiting RV equipment to 35-feet in length and 15-feet in width. As in Alternative B, a small apartment building and several campground hosts sites would be added.

The entire campground would be closed for the duration of the rehabilitation, estimated at one to two-years.

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### **Environmentally Preferred Alternative**

The Environmentally Preferred Alternative is defined by the Council on Environmental Quality as the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act [Section 101 (b)]. This section states that the Environmentally Preferred Alternative should:

1. “Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.
2. Ensure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.
3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.
4. Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice.
5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities.
6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.”

In this case, the NPS Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) is also the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. Implementing the Preferred Alternative would make the campground comparable to its original condition, maintain the structural and aesthetic integrity of each structure, provide universal access, improve the visitor experience, and prevent future degradation that could lead to campground closure and/or more extensive and costly rehabilitation. Completing the rehabilitation as outlined in Alternative B best protects cultural and natural resources and meets the basic project purpose, while minimizing adverse impacts to local businesses and visitors. Short-term, negligible impacts would occur to natural and cultural resources, visitor use, safety, and socioeconomic resources, while long-term moderate beneficial effects would occur.

Alternative A, No Action, would not fulfill the basic project purpose and would lead to the continued deterioration of the campground and its facilities. Structural damage could result and lead to the eventual closure of some of the facilities. Continued degradation of water and sewer lines could result in water pollution and potential health and safety issues. Facilities would not meet ADA guidelines.

Alternative C would include work that is not consistent with the park’s campground management policies. It would have more adverse effects on natural resources than Alternative B, particularly to

vegetation and wetlands. It would have more adverse effects than Alternative B to visitors and neighboring businesses during the rehabilitation.

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## **Public Involvement**

A public workshop was held at ANP October 16, 2001 to discuss campground rehabilitation with local business owners and other interested parties. In general, workshop participants were against adding electric hookups and showers to the campground because these facilities would not be in character with the rustic nature of the facility and would cause more direct competition with local businesses. They also felt that closing the campground during the shoulder seasons would have less impact to their businesses because campgrounds are generally not full during these times, and the private campgrounds could accommodate displaced campers.

The EA was made available in local libraries and on the ANP internet site for public review and comment during a 30-day period beginning August 8, 2003. Its availability was advertised in local papers. In addition, approximately 75 copies of the document were mailed directly to interested persons, the federally-recognized tribes in Maine, and regulatory agencies. The project was reviewed at the public meeting of the Acadia National Park Advisory Commission, who favored the adoption of Alternative B.

Four comments were received from the public (see attached). Friends of Acadia, a non-profit organization whose mission is to support Acadia National Park, wrote in favor of Alternative B because they felt it provided long-term benefits while preserving the quiet, rustic character of the campground. Two individuals requested that generators be banned from the campground. One of these preferred Alternative C and further suggested that electricity be provided to all RV sites, to provide an alternative to using generators. Adding electric hookups was considered and rejected (see EA) because it was felt that it would not be in character with providing a rustic setting, and it would put the NPS more in competition with local campgrounds. A local business owner wrote requesting that the NPS prohibit construction and keep the entire campground open from June 15 through September 15 during the rehabilitation, and, if necessary, the NPS extend the construction period over a longer time to compensate for lost work time. This request was in contrast to public opinion expressed in the workshop, which was to balance total closure and no summer closure with a partial closure. In addition, it would add significantly to the cost, and because the appropriation from Congress is for a fixed amount, could result in less work being done in the project. The same business owner requested that the NPS add sites to offset those that would be removed from the campground. While this action would sustain revenues to the park and nearby businesses, it would adversely impact approximately three acres of undisturbed land, would add a non-historic element to the campground. Again, because the campground rehabilitation funding is set by Congress at approximately \$3.5 million dollars, adding sites would reduce the amount of other rehabilitation work that could be accomplished.

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## **Decision (Alternative Selection)**

With guidance from *NPS Management Policies*, the park's *General Management Plan*, the ANP campground mission statement, natural and cultural resources information, using professional judgment regarding the adverse and beneficial effects of each alternative, and considering public comments, the NPS will rehabilitate Blackwoods Campground as described in Alternative B in the *Blackwoods Campground Rehabilitation and Policy Changes Environmental Assessment*.

## **Mitigation of Potential Impacts**

A number of mitigation activities will help to avoid or reduce potential impacts to the human environment. These activities will be incorporated into the construction plans and implemented as part of the rehabilitation. Mitigation activities include a phased closure plan that emphasizes work during the off-season and shoulder season, using Best Management Practices (erosion protection) during and after construction, stockpiling materials within already impacted areas and covering them to reduce the chance of siltation, using native plants for revegetation whenever possible, delineating construction vehicle traffic routes, reviewing the sources for all topsoil to reduce the possibility of introducing non-native plants and animals, and monitoring all areas of soil disturbance for three years following rehabilitation to detect and treat invasive weeds. Historic structures will be rehabilitated under the supervision of NPS cultural resource specialists to ensure that appropriate materials and techniques are used. All federal and state safety regulations will be observed during rehabilitation to maintain employee and visitor safety.

Mitigation measures described above and in the EA are generally required by laws, regulations, or NPS policies and are adopted by this decision.

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### **Why the Selected Alternative will not have a Significant Effect on the Human Environment**

The Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) (40 CFR 1508.13) requires decision makers to consider effects described in the EA and determine whether or not they would be significant before issuing a FONSI. Significance criteria are defined (40 CFR 1508.27) to consider direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts and the context and intensity of impacts.

### **Significance Criteria**

As defined in 40 CFR 1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

#### ***Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse***

Rehabilitating the campground will create some minor, temporary minor adverse impacts to visitor use and experiences, especially during the closure periods. Negligible temporary impacts to soils, vegetation, and air quality are expected to result from construction work. Minor adverse impacts to local socioeconomic resources are expected to occur during the closure periods, by limiting the supply of campsites and thereby reducing the number of visitors using adjacent businesses. These adverse impacts will be greatly outweighed by the moderate, long-term benefits of implementing Alternative B. Benefits include improving the condition of historic structures such as buildings, roads, and signs, and providing universal access to additional campsites and facilities. Limiting campsite sprawl and social trails and revegetating large sections of the campground will result in minor beneficial effects on campground vegetation. Moderate benefits to the cultural landscape are expected as these improvements are completed. Rehabilitation and changes in campground management policies are expected to have minor to moderate long-term beneficial effects on visitor use and experience.

#### ***Degree of effect on public health or safety***

Alternative B will provide minor, long-term benefits to public safety by improving the campground facilities and reducing nuisance animal problems and therefore, the threat of rabies. Beneficial effects will be restricted to the immediate campground area. All federal and state safety regulations will be observed during rehabilitation to maintain employee and visitor safety.

#### ***Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas***

Blackwoods Campground is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Rehabilitation would benefit these significant resources and the NPS is obligated to appropriately maintain these resources. There are no adverse effects expected to other parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas. Impacts to wetlands are not expected as evidenced by the attached correspondence with regulatory agencies administering the Clean Water Act, the Maine Natural Resource Protection Act, and the Maine Coastal Program.

Consultation with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (State Historic Preservation Office) in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be completed prior to initiating any on-site construction to assure that the project will have no adverse effect on cultural resources adjacent to or within the project area.

***Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial***

The rehabilitation of Blackwoods Campground has not been controversial as evidenced by the NPS receiving only four comments on the EA.

***Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks***

Alternative B does not appear to have any highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks. The planning process for this work has been significant and involved numerous professionals from the NPS, regulatory agencies, and private consultants.

***Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration***

It is important that both NPS campgrounds on Mount Desert Island be managed similarly to make both operations as efficient as possible and minimize confusion among park visitors. The decision to reduce the hours when generators could be operated in Blackwoods is not in agreement with the recent decision to ban generators in Seawall Campground (see Seawall Campground and Picnic Area Rehabilitation FONSI dated March 3, 2003, attached). However, reducing the hours for operating generators was not considered as an alternative in the Seawall Campground Rehabilitation EA. Discussions with RV users after the Seawall decision was issued indicated that if generators were banned, RV users might drive their RVs to other areas within the park to operate their generators and charge their RV batteries. This would increase traffic and vehicle emissions, and displace visitor conflicts from the campground to other areas of the park. Given this new information, park managers have decided to reduce the hours of generator use in both campgrounds as a first step toward reducing visitor complaints. Should this prove ineffective in reducing visitor complaints, the NPS may consider banning the use of generators in both campgrounds.

***Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts***

Rehabilitating the campground is an individual component of the overall plan for rehabilitating and improving park facilities. The rehabilitation does not create any significant cumulative impacts when considered with other ongoing and proposed projects in and near the park.

***Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources***

Alternative B will help prevent the deterioration and possible future loss of cultural resources eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. No ground-disturbing work will begin until the project has been reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office and a determination of no adverse effect has been received.

***Degree to which the action may adversely affect any endangered or threaten species or its critical habitat***

Alternative B will not have any affect on any endangered or threaten species or their critical habitat as determined by NPS and consulting biologists and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (letter attached).

***Whether the action, threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law***

Alternative B will not threaten or violate any environmental protection laws. The rehabilitation work will comply with all federal, state and local laws and is an activity that is fully within and allowed by any such laws.

***Impairment***

In addition to reviewing the list of significance criteria, the NPS has determined that implementing the preferred alternative will not constitute an impairment of ANP resources and values. This determination is based on a through analysis of the impacts described in the EA, considering the four public comments received, and the professional judgment of the ANP superintendent and regional director in accordance with the NPS Management Policies (December 27, 2000). Implementing the selected alternative would not result in major, adverse impacts to a resource or value whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of ANP; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of ANP; or (3) identified as a goal in the ANP General Management Plan or other relevant NPS planning documents.

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

The implementation of the selected alternative, "Alternative B", will not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. The selected alternative will have beneficial effects and protect important cultural and historic resources. This alternative will not have a significant adverse effect on the human environment. Negative environmental impacts that could occur are negligible or minor in intensity, short-term in duration, and generally localized. There are no significant impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, historic properties either listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of Alternative B will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

**Recommended:** \_\_\_\_\_ /s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Sheridan Steele  
Superintendent, Acadia National Park

10/29/03

**Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_ /s/ Chrysandra Walter for\_\_\_\_\_  
Marie Rust  
Director, Northeast Region

11/17/03

